



INL visitors bring business to local hotels, restaurants, car rental companies and attractions. For example, about 50 industry and university experts attended July's second annual Advanced Test Reactor National Scientific User Facility Workshop.

## INL-hosted conferences boost Idaho Falls, regional economy

by [Rebecca Jones](#), *INL Communications & Public Affairs*

As eastern Idaho's largest employer, Idaho National Laboratory has an undeniable impact on the local economy. Yet when an INL-hosted professional conference like the Control Systems Cyber Security Advanced Training comes to Idaho Falls, most people overlook its economic effects. Nonetheless, the 40 attendees for this four-day conference spent an estimated \$4,584 collectively on goods and services, which is great fiscal news for the Idaho Falls economy.

Hundreds of visitors come to Idaho Falls for lab-hosted conferences, as invited speakers and honored professionals, to foster and continue collaborations, and for VIP tours. While they are here, these visitors stay in local hotels, rent cars, go out to dinner and visit regional recreational sights — contributing to local economies throughout their entire visit.

"Certainly there are other businesses taking advantage of Idaho Falls hotels and facilities, but I do know that a good portion of this business has to do with the lab and lab-related work," says Robb Chiles, president and CEO of the Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce.

In 2008, the number of attendees at INL-hosted professional conferences ranged from 25 to 465 visitors apiece, including 60 international visitors. According to Janaye Sanders, former INL conference coordinator, these 2008 numbers are fairly average for yearly conference attendance. These visitors bring a significant amount of revenue for the Idaho Falls economy, with anticipated per diems of \$114.60 per person for lodging, meals and incidentals.

The revenue for Idaho Falls begins with the visitors' travel expenses to and around the city. Beyond patronizing the airlines that serve Idaho Falls, visitors are also responsible for their own transportation in town, boosting local car rental companies.

Conference attendees are also responsible for their own lodging. The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) spending guidelines compel visitors to keep their daily room rates under \$76 a night in Idaho Falls. To help visitors find rooms in this price range that are convenient to INL offices, conference planners will often block out a number of rooms at local hotels and direct conference participants there. The Shilo Inn, one frequently recommended hotel, reported 229 room reservations in conjunction with one INL-hosted conference in July 2008.

Another "good indicator of the influence of the lab," Chiles said, is the winter hotel occupancy rate. During the tourism off-season, conference-related lodging provides a good amount of business for local hotels, which maintain an average 60 percent winter occupancy rate.

And conference attendees frequently eat out during their stays, which bodes well for Idaho Falls restaurants. INL occasionally provides lunches or other working meals, but conference attendees are responsible for funding most of their meals, with a GSA-mandated per diem of \$39 for meals and incidentals.

In addition to these basic needs, INL conference attendees often extend their travel to regional recreation sights, supporting the economies of the surrounding area. If there is enough interest, the conference planners will frequently help organize an informal group trip to nearby national parks or popular tourist attractions, says Sanders.

When INL sponsored the National Federation of Press Women's annual conference in September 2008, organizers provided tours of myriad regional attractions. In conjunction with the three-day conference, the group visited Challis, Stanley, Sun Valley, Jackpot, Burley, Twin Falls, Fort Hall, Soda Springs, Lava Hot Springs, Yellowstone National Park and Jackson, Wyo. The group's pre-conference tour included 31 attendees and a post-conference tour sold out at 63 attendees, the most rooms that could be reserved in Yellowstone for the group.

Although most INL visitors don't embark on such extensive tours, every stay impacts local service providers. These visitors and conference



*Attendees of the INL-sponsored National Federation of Press Women's annual conference in September 2008.*

attendees come to Idaho Falls to continue professional relationships with INL, and the entire regional economy benefits from their stay. And in tough economic times, every boost helps.

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